



COVID-19 AND ITS EFFECT ON LEGAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has a profound effect on every industry in India, including the legal sector. Unexpected catastrophes have wreaked havoc on the legal business. The Covid-19 epidemic disrupted legal practise. The Covid-19 epidemic struck at a time when India was already focusing on the digitalization of the judiciary and court administration system, as well as the establishment of e-courts or virtual courts for different purposes. However, because of the abrupt and unexpected breakout of covid-19, the legal sector underwent a rapid shift. India's legal profession is increasingly utilising cutting-edge technology at every level of the litigation process. As part of the safety measures, the government of India imposed a nationwide lockdown and restricted people's movement between locations; thus, physical appearance of lawyers in courts was discouraged. As a result, the Indian legal industry adopted new ways of working with new technologies, including the establishment of e-courts. The purpose of this paper is to examine and broadly cover the situation in India as a result of the pandemic, including how covid-19 impacted the Indian legal system, including advocates, law firms, judges, and aggrieved parties seeking legal aid, and then to examine how the court administrative system responded to this situation as a result of the uncontrollable outbreak of the corona virus pandemic. It will identify some gaps in the current legal framework. It will next explore how the covid-19 problems have had a significant influence on the legal system in the United States of America and what issues the legal industry has encountered.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Legal, Pandemic, Digitization.

INTRODUCTION:

COVID-19 is a fatal illness that has struck India, the world's second most populous country. From Wuhan, China, the coronavirus has spread to several nations, including India. The WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic on January 20, 2020. The coronavirus illness is the first to affect India's economy and health system since 1918's Spanish flu. Covid-19 harmed the country's political, social, economic, and legal system. Controlling coronavirus outbreaks in India, the world's second most populous country, is difficult. As a result, the Indian government ordered a countrywide lockdown on March 24, 2020, with just a few critical services running. After then, India would be shut down. This epidemic affects every aspect of civilization. Many individuals are suffering psychologically and financially as a result of the epidemic. This unforeseen pandemic period is the roughest moment in migrant workers' lives. Globally, people have had to adjust to changing technology and work styles. As a result of the lockdowns, organisations have had to change their work modes to allow everyone to work from home. Secure audio and video conferencing has grown in popularity as a means of communication and professional services. Companies have tried to make online mode more effective and convenient for employees. Also, the education industry is forced to adopt virtual learning. The legal profession is likewise experiencing new difficulties. The rapid spread of coronavirus infection has resulted in the closure of all courts and tribunals across the country, posing significant problems to India's court administration structure. So the judiciary has devised a new approach to help attorneys, litigants, and the justice delivery system. To avoid the spread of covid-19, the judiciary has chosen virtual courts, e courts, and e filings. The legal sector is reluctant to adopt new technology. But covid-19, but driving the legal business to digital. As a result, the legal industry recognised the need for new technology and began working appropriately. Currently, every court and tribunal in India has installed modern equipment that allows for virtual court hearings. Even before the epidemic, some courts were set to become digital. The legal profession is one of the society's strong pillars, yet it is threatened by the epidemic. Because of the temporary shutdown of the courts, many attorneys in the nation are struggling to earn a living. However, online legal work has shown to be more effective, cost-effective, time-efficient, and environmentally beneficial, as it saves paper and reduces pollution. The sudden move to virtual mode in the legal profession is both a blessing and a curse.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LEGAL INDUSTRY:

Advocates: According to Chief Justice of India NV Ramana, the COVID-19 epidemic has taken a toll on the Indian judiciary, judges, and court personnel, who have been badly damaged physically and mentally by the virus. The rapid and unexpected epidemic of covid-19 impacts advocates worldwide in their everyday professional legal activity, ultimately affecting the legal profession. It might be stated that our country's judicial system has come to a standstill. Due to the nationwide lockdown, the court has decided to conduct virtual hearings and to confine cases to urgent matters solely via video conference in order to ensure that justice is not harmed. This decision was made to assure the continuance of judicial proceeding services while protecting the individuals responsible for delivering such services through strategic remoteness. In today's environment, the legal profession must rely increasingly on technology. In India, litigating attorneys are mostly comprised of advocates who make their income on a daily basis; they are

primarily junior lawyers who operate under the supervision of a senior lawyer. These struggling lawyers rely on new filings and daily hearings, but owing to the epidemic, they have lost their source of income and are unable to find work. Additionally, individuals are unable to meet with lawyers for help owing to travel restrictions. They are unprepared for this calamitous epidemic. Online hearing that has been subjected to motion is significantly less than physical hearing. Neither judges nor attorneys are prepared for the new way of doing business. Some of them are having difficulty running new technologies, since they are unfamiliar with the latest software and technological equipment. However, activists are forced to utilise them. Now, attorneys throughout India must be technophile in all part of their lives in order to meet future difficulties.

The entire globe is fearful and scared as a result of enormous health issues. A sudden and unexpected Corona virus epidemic instills dread in the populace. Law firms take a step back to cope with a pandemic on a worldwide scale. The judicial system is suffering from tragedy as a result of the mass breakout. Law companies are unable to conduct successful legal activities. Law companies' cases steadily dwindle when scheduled hearings are postponed and inquiries are reduced, finally reducing the number of cases the company expects in a day. As a result, they are fearful of losing clients and are stressed out if their legal company is forced out of the commercial market. Law companies are seeing a significant impact on their income streams. They are unable to contact new clients, which has an adverse effect on income creation. On the other hand, many legal firms have adapted to the change and moved to an online style of operation where they can communicate with their workers and clients. They provide their clients online counselling and resolution. Additionally, they conduct meetings, conferences, file sharing, and all other processes that a legal office performs online. They may communicate with their team using platforms such as Google Hangouts, Zoom, and others. Law companies choose a specialised platform to communicate with and track their workers' work. Additionally, law firms implement innovative rules to benefit their staff and clients. Now, law companies must be more futuristic or future-oriented, as the influence of covid will be long-lasting, necessitating the development of a future strategy for their law businesses in order to address the impending problems. The epidemic is going to alter the Indian legal system's culture.

Covid-19 A pandemic has a profound effect on the functioning of judicial institutions. As a result of the corona virus outbreak, the Supreme Court of India has decided to conduct the trial virtually via various platforms such as zoom. However, some of the judges are not technologically savvy and have no idea how to use virtual platforms. As a result, those judges are encountering difficulties. Many district courts in India lack suitable infrastructure, have insufficient working conditions, and often lack consistent internet connections necessary for conducting legal proceedings online. Thus, these courts require modification in order to enhance their condition and contribute to the development of a robust digital infrastructure. The judiciary requires reform, but it cannot occur quickly. It is necessary to improve subordinate courts by giving technical assistance to them. The number of cases pending has grown. As the number of new cases filed daily increases, the number of pending cases continues to grow. As a result of a dearth of judges with adequate knowledge of technology. Pendency at the Supreme

Court increased 10.35% from 60,469 cases on March 1, 2020 to 66,727 cases on March 1, 2021.

The aggrieved party requesting legal aid: Access to justice has become increasingly difficult for the public as a result of the courts' abrupt closure. The terrible epidemic that has resulted in a severe countrywide lockdown has had a significant negative influence on the underprivileged part of society and poor individuals who are deprived of basic necessities. Many people's human rights have been infringed as a result of the epidemic. The NALSA is empowered to act and respond to the problems of the society's poorer and unprivileged classes. NALSA was established pursuant to Section 3 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. (Act). NALSA's mission is to supervise and monitor the provision of legal assistance in accordance with the Act's Section 2(1)(c). 3 Article 39A of the Indian Constitution assures equal justice for everyone by providing free legal assistance to the impoverished and weaker sectors of society. 4so that everyone has a chance to seek legal redress and justice. Numerous instances have been seen in which family of arrested individuals receive no aid from a lawyer. Additionally, many aggrieved parties were unable to contact their attorneys for help owing to the abrupt lockout. The legal service authority and government have taken several measures to ensure appropriate justice by providing enough legal aid to the public.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON USA'S LEGAL INFRASTRUCTURE:

Not only has the COVID-19 epidemic harmed India's infrastructure, but it has also proven to be a significant setback for First World nations such as America. America, too, is seeing closures across the country; many legal firms have implemented cost-cutting measures, such as income reductions and layoffs. Given the pandemic's impact on the whole legal system, we must dive deeply into it to have a deeper understanding. Demand in the legal field is dwindling: In general, all law firms have witnessed a significant drop in their business. Clio's study indicates that the number of legal matters handled weekly by the surveyed companies has decreased by more than thirty percent since the start of the year. Additionally, the research reveals that about 56% of law firms have seen a significant drop in the need for legal assistance. The consumer's attitude is one of the primary causes for this huge reduction in legal problems. According to Clio's study, more than half of respondents are likely deferring their legal problems until the COVID-19 epidemic is finished. Whereas the research indicates that 22% were sure that attorneys had totally ceased offering legal aid services.

Job losses in the legal sector: A study by the United States According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, roughly 60,000 positions have been lost in the legal industry since April 2020, bringing the overall number of legal sector employment to 1,097,006. And this figure includes lawyers, paralegals, and other professionals. In general, there has been a massive loss of jobs across all sectors. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that 20 million jobs were lost in April across the country. Unemployment also increased by 10.3 percent, the highest level since January 1948. The present COVID-19 pandemic crisis has compelled many legal firms to respond dramatically and adapt their practises accordingly. To mitigate the damage created by this circumstance, several businesses have reduced compensation payouts and downsized their workforces. According to the newest McKinsey research, there will be a diverse variety of needs across several legal areas in the near future. The pandemic scenario will serve as a catalyst for the acceleration of legal services digitalization and modernisation.

CONCLUSION:

The current state of the Covid pandemic is quite unclear, and it is difficult to anticipate how long these social distancing norms and limitations will remain in effect. Numerous experts, however, believe that even if the Corona epidemic has ended, its consequences will continue to be felt for a long time. The current conditions have already begun to push the Indian Legal System into a new digital era, which is a positive development. One of these innovations has been the integration of the Virtual Court System into the judicial delivery system. The roadblocks and challenges encountered during this period should be viewed as a window of opportunity to redesign and improve our legal infrastructure.

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